

A YEAR AND A DAY



BY THE AUTHOR OF
"CHRISTIE REDFERN."

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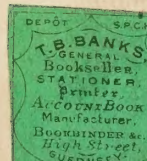
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A YEAR AND A DAY.

A STORY OF CANADIAN LIFE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

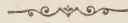
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A YEAR AND A DAY.

CHAPTER I.

Waiting.

THE "Curtis girls" were sitting in a large and pleasant farm-house kitchen, at a late hour for farm-house hours. They were waiting for the return home of their only brother, who was a good many years younger than either of them, and there was reason to fear that, though his absence weighed heavily on them, his coming would give them little pleasure. He was only their half-brother, and until within a year or two, since the death of their step-mother, they had never had the same home. But they loved him dearly, and would have done or borne much to save him from the utter ruin towards which he seemed to be hastening.

They had been the "Curtis girls" to the Greenhill village folks, and indeed to all in the township of Broadmeadows, for the last

twenty years and more, and they were the "Curtis girls" still, though Anne was almost an old woman now, and even Susan had left her youth behind her. Their mother had died when Susan was a baby, leaving her to the care of the fifteen year old Anne, who had well taken the mother's place to the child. They had not been very happy after their father's second marriage, and at seventeen Anne had undertaken to do for herself, and had succeeded well in the opinion of those who had known her all her life.

For seventeen years Anne had taught the village school. That was at a time when in that part of Canada the school year meant three, or at most four, months of every summer and winter. The village of Greenhill was a small place then; there were only a score or two of pupils in the school, and the teaching required was of the simplest; and Anne was successful among them with a better kind of success than often falls to the lot of a teacher.

Her teaching was only a part of her work during these years. She had spun and woven many a web during her morning and evening leisure, and in her long vacations she had sewed and knitted and given a helping hand in time of need to many an anxious mother and tired housekeeper for the first seven years, and then she had made a home for herself in the cottage, and taken her little sister Susan to live with her. After that, for ten years, things had gone on very much as before, till her

health failed, and then Susan had taken her place in the school.

The sisters were not alike in all respects, but the difference was due rather to circumstances—to the difference in the discipline which life had brought to the two than to dissimilarity of natural character. Anne was strong and cheerful, and patient; Susan was strong and cheerful, but she was not patient. She had had an easier time. All through her youth she had been cared for and shielded as her sister had never been, and met less calmly the ills and vexations that fall to the lot of most people now and then, and that fall oftener than now and then to the lot of a teacher. The neighbours spoke of her as a brighter girl than Anne had ever been; but she held her head high, they said, and had little scornful ways with people she did not like, which were sometimes resented more than she knew.

As a girl she had been very beautiful; and sitting in the firelight in the farm-house kitchen, with a look on her face which told that the cloud of care and anxiety upon it was not a mere transitory visitor, she was a beautiful woman still. Her dress in its extreme simplicity did nothing to set off her beauty, and the frown that now and then gathered her forehead into wrinkles would have spoiled most faces not in their first youth; but when her look softened as she turned toward her sister, there was something better than mere beauty seen in it.

As for Anne, her thin pallid face was more than beautiful. The beauty upon it shone from within. A strong, patient, trustful spirit looked out from the soft grey eye, and touched the broad white brow and the firm yet gentle curve of the lips with a radiance which neither sickness nor sorrow, nor hastening old age could have power to dim. Her earnestness had called a tinge of colour to the faded cheek, and a wistfulness to her eyes, as she watched her sister in silence. Susan rose after a little, and, moving about the room, put her hands on this and that, opened and shut a door or two, and then sat down again.

“But, sister, think! Is there anything that the Lord cannot do?”

“There are many things He does not do. The boy is only going as others have gone before him—as others are going every day.”

“But the Lord does hear prayer. I hold on to that.”

There was no answer, and the first speaker went on: “Yes, I hold on to that. If the Lord should forget us, turning a deaf ear to us in our trouble, and should let our brother go down to death, why, it would almost seem like a broken promise on His part—and that is impossible.”

“I have prayed many a prayer that never brought an answer.”

“But for a brother’s soul, Sue!—a brother’s soul! That is different from the little things that go no farther than this world. I know

you've had trouble, dear, and a sick heart, but this is different. A soul to be saved! Why, He loves to do it. 'No pleasure in the death of the sinner.' He says it Himself. And 'Ask, and ye shall receive.' I don't know what we are both thinking of, to be so down-hearted to-night. It will come all right, Susie, if we believe God's word," said her sister, softly. "There is nothing in all the world we can be so sure of as that."

Susan moved restlessly in her chair, and made no answer for a moment. She was thinking of some things in her life that had gone wrong, and that never could be put right again.

"At the end you mean. That his soul will be saved at last. But a life of degradation in the meantime! Can that seem right to you? What use has our coming here been to him?"

"Who can tell? We are only at the beginning yet. We were not seeking our own pleasure in coming. I believe God will accept the motive of our giving up our home to come here, and He will not let the desire be lost. We can leave it in His hands, dear."

"Yes, you can. I am not so sure of myself—of the simplicity of my motives, I mean. I was so tired of teaching, and of that gossiping village, that I was glad at the prospect of any change. I cared for Mark, of course, and wished to help him; but I was thinking of myself as well."

“And, indeed, so was I,” said Anne, cheerfully, “and of you. I longed to be at home in the old place again. I thought it would be better for us, as well as for Mark.”

“But it does not look now as though we could stay here very long, and we cannot get to our own house till the lease is out.”

“It is too soon to think of all that, dear. We may stay here all our lives for all we know yet. Don’t let us meet trouble half-way, Susie. We have the summer before us, at any rate.”

“Yes, we have the summer before us,” said her sister. “But do we see one step of the way?”

“And we need not, dear. It is better so,” said Anne, with loving persistence.

“I suppose it is better so.”

When the Curtis girls at their step-mother’s death accepted their young brother’s invitation to make their home at the farm, it was for his sake they did so. They knew that it would not be a good thing for the young man to be left there by himself, but they did not know how much he needed them. For even before his mother’s death he had been falling into evil ways, through the influence of evil companionship. He was weak more than wicked, easily led either for good or evil; and with his sisters to make his home pleasant to him he might have recovered himself in time, had not another influence, in Susan’s opinion

altogether evil, been brought to bear upon him.

The point where three townships met, about four miles east of the village of Greenhill, was called Kavanagh Corners, two brothers of that name holding farms in two townships on the opposite sides of the way. Besides the two farm-houses there were a few other houses, a tavern, a blacksmith's shop, and a general "store," where all things needed for family use which the farms could not produce, and a good many other things also, were to be found. A post-office had lately been established there, and partly because of this, and partly for other reasons, the Corners had become a place of resort for leisure days and for summer and winter evenings for many of the young men of the neighbourhood; and none of them were the better for the habit into which they had fallen.

The Kavanaghs had been men holding a good position in their own country, it was said; but, unhappily, they had brought only the vices of their class to the land of their adoption; and it was well known in the country-side that they did not scruple to make use of the frequenters of the Corners, and of these means, for their own profit. Horse-racing and betting were carried on among them; and in Brady's tavern other forms of gambling were encouraged. Brady was a relation of the Kavanaghs, and the interest of one was the interest of all; and by his wily ways and his persuasive tongue,

and by the drink which flowed freely both in public and in private in his house, he helped their plans, and brought many foolish and thoughtless young men into the net which they had spread for them.

With none of them all had he succeeded more readily than with Mark Curtis; and just at the time when his mother's sudden death had made him more thoughtful than usual, and when the influence of his step-sisters might have helped to keep him at home, and out of harm's way, something happened which promised to give his enemy a stronger hold over the young man than ever.

The sudden death of Brady's sister and her husband in Ireland had left their family of three children but slenderly provided for, and Brady, kindly disposed toward them, and well aware that in Canada they need not be long burdensome to any one, sent for them all to come out to him. He never did a better stroke of business in his life than that, he told James Kavanagh, before the two boys and their sister had been in the house a month. The boys were bright, intelligent lads, ready to be made useful in any of the many ways open to their uncle in his double capacity of tavern-keeper and farmer; but it was Mary Bell, the sister, whose coming was to him the chief matter of congratulation.

Not very often during a lifetime does one see so perfectly beautiful a person as she.

She was tall and straight, with jet black hair, and the changing blue eyes and lovely colour that in her countrywomen so often go with it. Before the first week of her stay at the Corners was over, her uncle saw in the admiration she excited among the frequenters of the place a chance to advance his own interests by her means. When a month was over he was not so sure of this; but he was very sure of one thing—his niece had only to say the word to become the wife of Mark Curtis, and the mistress of one of the finest farms in the country. This was the form that gossip took, when the talk of Mark's infatuation for the niece of Timothy Brady reached his sisters. Knowing nothing of her personally, and judging of what she might be by the ill report which had long ago gone out about her relatives at the Corners, the rumour came like a heavy blow to them both. Anne grieved over it; Susan resented it. Anne thought most of what it might be for the young man's welfare; Susan, of the disgrace of being connected with people so disreputable; but neither of them thought it wise to speak to their brother about the matter till he himself should give them an opening to do so; and up to this night, when they sat waiting for his return, no word had been spoken between them. In the silence that followed Susan's last sorrowful words, she sat trying to make up her mind that when her brother came home she would speak to

him about the folly of going so much to the Corners, and about Mary Bell.

"Or perhaps the morning would be a better time for it," said she to herself, "unless he be more like himself than he was the last time he came home."

The sound of a horse's step was heard outside, and the gate swung open.

"Anne, you had much better go to your room," said Susan, hastily.

"No; I will stay here."

She had only a minute or two to wait, and then the door opened and the brother came in. A frank, handsome lad he looked, and to-night there was no trace of the evil influence of the Corners upon him.

"What! Not in bed yet, Anne? You must be better. I am glad."

"You are earlier to-night," said Susan.

"Yes, I am earlier. I have only been over at Mrs. Crawford's. Poor John is very low. He must have been worse all along than the doctors supposed. They have sent for his brother."

"For Adam?" said Anne.

"Yes; they expected him awhile ago, but something happened to prevent his coming. But they have sent for him now, and to-night there came word that he would be here at once, and he is to bring his boys with him. They were coming to stay the summer at the farm, at any rate. It will all be his now, I suppose. Poor John, it seems hard, doesn't it?"



Earlier home than usual.

Anne asked several questions about the sick man and his mother, and after answering her readily and fully, Mark said—

“Has Clemmy gone to bed? I say, Sue, can you give me some supper? I am very hungry.”

“Surely—I will get you something at once.”

While he ate it Anne still sat beside him; and as she talked and as she listened a new and blessed sense of thankfulness filled her heart.

“He is all right to-night, Sue, thank God,” said she when they went to their room together.

“Yes. I wonder why he did not go to the Corners, and how he happened to be at Mrs. Crawford’s to-night.”

“Did you hear him say that Adam was coming home?” asked Anne, after a little.

“Yes, I heard him,” said Susan; and no other word was spoken on the subject that night.

Adam Crawford had been more to the Curtis girls in old times than just a neighbour’s son. He had been Anne’s pupil until he got beyond her capabilities as a teacher, and indeed for a good while after that. He had been her best help among the wilful lads of the school when it was becoming not an easy matter for her either to govern or to teach the greatly increasing numbers as the

village grew larger. He and Susan had learned many a lesson together in Miss Anne's little parlour, and had dipped with great delight into studies of which Miss Anne had hardly heard. They had been great friends always, until Adam had sought to be more than a friend; and then Susan, who had her girlish ideal of a lover very different from Adam, or any young farmer of them all, had dismissed him with lighter words than their long friendship and his manly declaration merited. Then Adam, caring little for the farm which his father had purchased for him close by the old homestead, took the portion that fell to him instead of it, and went away.

Then Susan, to her utter surprise and dismay, found out that he had taken the greater part of her interest in life with him. This was about the time when her school-keeping experience began. She had taken Anne's place by this time—and yet not quite Anne's place, for the school had grown in numbers, and the supreme authority was in the hands of a master, and Susan was assistant-teacher only. She had enough to do, and did it well, and would not allow to herself that she had a sore heart to hide. She heard often of Adam at first. She did not hear very good news of him. He did not succeed very well, it seemed. He tried his hand at many things the first year or two—farming, teaching, store-keeping. He was “a rolling stone”;

and in secret—almost in secret from herself—Susan took comfort in the thought that by-and-by he would come home again. And so five years passed; and when she was beginning to say gravely to herself that her youth was passing away, word came that Adam was coming home.

It was in the spring that this was said. All through the long winter the sisters had been planning to pass Susan's summer vacation at St. C—— Springs, noted for their beneficial effect in cases of the disease from which Anne had long suffered, and which had been more trying than usual during the winter's cold. When warm weather came Anne was better, and made difficulties as to their going away in a manner not at all like herself. Then she acknowledged that she did not like the thought of missing Adam Crawford's visit. But their plans had been long made. The neighbours knew all about them, and Susan was firm.

"If he cares to see us he will find us, wherever we are," said she, adding to herself, with a little sinking of the heart, "if he has not forgotten;" and she waited, hoping that he might return before they went away.

And so he did, and brought his wife with him. Susan got through the few days of teaching that remained, and through the public examinations which were beginning to be thought much of in Greenhill at that time,

and did not acknowledge, even to herself, that her life was a burden to her. She did her part in the day's show, with all the village and Adam Crawford and his pretty wife looking on; and the people said to one another that the year's work had worn on her, that she did not take things easy enough, and that it would do her good to get away for a time.

It did her good to get away from Greenhill, and she came back ready for another year's work in school—drudgery she called it to herself—and she would have given much to be able to get away from it all. Not once during their absence was the name of Adam Crawford mentioned between the sisters, nor afterwards, except as the name of any friend might have been spoken.

Adam was gone from Broadmeadows before they came home, and from that time they heard little of him till that night when Mark told them that he had been sent for because his only brother was in danger.

It would have been better for Susan if she had at first looked her trouble in the face, if she had not utterly refused to acknowledge the sense of humiliation that must needs come, I suppose, to a woman whose love is given to a man who never cared for it, or who has ceased to care for it. If she had even yielded so far as to accept her sister's silent sympathy with her trouble it would have been better. As it was, the whole

world darkened to her for a while, and worse still, "refuge failed her." She lost, for the time, her hold on those eternal truths, in the presence of which earthly joys and earthly sorrows alike fail to move the steadfast soul. It had been her endeavour hitherto to do service to her Lord in serving His people—in sustaining the weak and comforting the sorrowful among them; but in her own time of trouble she could take neither the strength nor the comfort to herself.

After a while she "got over it" in a way, and looked back to the suffering of this time with wonder in which was also contempt. But she grew very tired of her teaching and her monotonous life, and when her step-mother died, and her brother Mark asked them to go and live at the farm she was very glad to go. If she had had her way their pretty village home would have been sold, and she would have turned her back on Greenhill and her old life for ever. But Anne was wiser.

"When Mark marries we shall want it again. I am too old to look for another home," said she.

And no wonder that the home, which so long ago she had made for herself and her little sister, and where, notwithstanding hard work and many cares, they had been so happy together, should be dear to her.

And then cares and troubles of another kind fell upon them. Gradually it became clear to them that they could not be all to

Mark that they had hoped to be—that he was farther down the evil way than they had feared. He was kind and pleasant when he was himself always, but even when he was himself he would suffer no word of reproof, or even of remonstrance, as to the foolish course he was pursuing. At least, he would not from Susan. Anne said little to him about his wrong and foolish ways, but she prayed for him night and day, and suffered no bitterness to rise in her heart toward him for his folly, as Susan was in danger of doing; and she never lost hold of the belief that God would not forget them, and that it would come all right with the poor foolish lad some time; and so months went on, till Mary Bell came to Kavanagh Corners, and then in her secret heart Susan gave him up. That Mary Bell was just one of the same bad lot she took for granted, and that her hold on him would never be relaxed while it suited her purpose she believed; and so she gave him up as lost, as far as any comfort his sisters might look for from him. But Mary Bell's name had never been mentioned between them as yet.

CHAPTER II.

‡ The Common Lot ‡

POOR old Mrs. Crawford needed sympathy and help in her time of trouble. She had been a widow but a few years, and since then she had lost her eldest son by a sudden stroke ; and now the second lay on his death-bed. She had grown older by many years within the month, Anne thought, when she went to see her next day. She had been a strong, self-reliant woman always, taking her full share in all the measures and means that had brought prosperity to their house. She was self-reliant still ; but she broke down a little when she saw Anne, and the slow unwilling tears of old age fell over her withered cheeks.

“Is it you, Miss Anne ?” said the sick man. “I am glad you are come. I am waiting for Adam to come home. There must be one of us here, you know, on the old place. I am only waiting for Adam.”

Anne was not quite sure whether he knew what he was saying, and she held his hand in silence.

“You are tired, mother,” said he again. “You can trust me with Miss Anne. Go and lie down a while. Can you stay with me a little while, Miss Anne ? You used to make it plain to the children at the school. Tell me about ‘the Way, the Truth, and the Life.’ Go, mother, you can leave me with Miss Anne.”

“Yes ; lie down, dear Mrs. Crawford,” said Anne. “I only wish I were better able to help you. But I can sit with John for a little while.”

“Oh ! we have good help. Old Martha is here, and Timothy Brady’s niece, Mary Bell, who is capable and helpful, and kind too. But if you can stay for a little while, I will go and lie down, as you say.”

If it had been Susan to whom she was speaking, it would have startled her greatly to hear the name of Mary Bell. But the sick man’s eyes were fixed on Anne, and she could only think of him. Mrs. Crawford was led gently away by some one, and then Anne heard again—

“Tell me about it. I thought I knew, but all things look so different to me lying here, and I have done many wrong things in my life, and have forgotten God. And now I am only waiting for Adam. There is so much to do, and he has been busied with other kinds of work of late. But tell me about the Way, Miss Anne.”

She sat down beside him, smoothing his pillows, and laying a fresh wet cloth on his hot brow. Her gentle touches soothed him. She was not sure whether his mind wandered or not, but she said softly—

“Adam will know what to do. Don’t fret about the place. You know who said, ‘I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.’ You have not forgotten Him altogether, and you may be sure He does not forget you now.”

“Tell me about the Way; I can do nothing now.”

“And you never could,” said Miss Anne; and simply, as she used to tell it to her Sabbath-class five-and-twenty years ago, she told him about the way of peace which God has opened for man. By-and-by she became aware that she had other listeners. Her brother Mark sat away from the bed near the door; and while she spoke a soft and shapely hand was stretched out with the drink which the sick man craved, and looking up, Miss Anne saw a beautiful face, and met the glance of a pair of blue eyes, at once frank and shy, and altogether pleasant. But she did not think of the beauty till afterwards, when she was telling her sister about her visit. She could only think of the poor man and his anxious looks and eager listening; and she went on speaking now and then words that were not her own, till he fell into slumber again.

She stayed all day, and came home at night too weary to say much to any one. But next morning, as she sat at breakfast with her brother and sister, telling Susan about her visit to poor John Crawford, the remembrance of the blue eyes that had met hers so pleasantly came back to her, and she said—

“Who is helping Mrs. Crawford, Mark? She told me the name, I think, but it has passed out of my mind. Was it Timothy Brady’s niece that she said?”

"That must be Mary Bell," said Susan, looking up at her brother. Mark reddened.

"Yes. She has suddenly taken a fancy to be independent," said he. Then he rose and went out.

"Is she as pretty as they say?" asked Susan.

"She has a very lovely face, and a good face," said Anne, considering. "It is strange I did not think who she might be. But I had always thought of Mary Bell as quite different from that."

"And Mark's interest in poor John Crawford is accounted for now," said Susan.

"It may be the Lord's way to save the lad, who knows?" said Anne.

But Susan shook her head.

"Oh, Anne! It does seem as though you had faith to 'remove mountains.' But Tim Brady's niece!"

But Anne did not seem to hear her. She was gazing out at the open door over the green level fields to the hills beyond, but her thoughts were elsewhere, her sister knew. When she spoke again it was to say,

"Will you go to the Hill to-day? I cannot but think of poor Mrs. Crawford alone in her trouble."

"But, Anne, you forget. I could not comfort her as you could do, and they do not need the help I could give them, even if I could be spared from home. A nurse is coming to-day, and Mark is to watch to-night. Yes," she

added, reddening a little, as she met her sister's eye, "I know what you mean. It is partly that I do not want to see this Mary Bell just now; but there are other reasons, and one is that I could do no good if I went."

Susan had certainly enough to do at home, and all the more that of late Mark had "taken things easy," as his man John Grier declared. John himself took things easy, but he was faithful, and on the whole pretty capable of keeping things going out of doors; and the same might be said of John's sister, Clemmy, who was Susan's chief help within doors. But at this busy season of the year there were many things to be attended to which did not seem to fall within the particular province of either of these worthies, and it was Susan's part to see that they were not neglected altogether. The young lambs and calves needed looking after, and the garden, even after the heavier part of the work was done, needed constant care.

But Susan liked all this. It was a mistake her having been brought up a village girl and a teacher, she used to say to Anne. She liked going about among the growing creatures of the farm, and she liked gardening, and the keeping track of John and his field-work; and pleasure and duty thus for once coinciding in her experience, Susan would have had a very enjoyable spring if it had not been for this anxiety about Mark—and for one other thing besides.



“The trivial round, the common task.”

For even in this sweet spring season, with so much of beauty about her, and with all her interest in her many occupations, she was not happy. Her youth was gone, and that was not the worst of it. It had been wasted. For long years she had waited for Adam Crawford. He had been her first thought all that time. All that she had done and enjoyed had been in a sense secondary to her thought of him, her belief in him, her love for him. Looking back to the time before Adam came home, she could not altogether despise herself because of this; for he had loved her; but then he had forgotten her, and her scorn of her own weakness in not being able to forget him had spoiled her life.

For all this trouble had not been like a chastisement coming directly from the hand of God, under which she might have humbled herself, might have grown better and sweeter, and more helpful and trustful, as she had seen Anne growing every day of her life, under the trouble of sore sickness that had fallen upon her. Her own folly had spoiled her life, she said to herself with bitterness. She had missed the blessing that might have come to her through self-forgetfulness, through single-mindedness in God's service. She had got little good, and had done less; missing opportunities, despising good gifts, because that which she had craved had been denied her; and the best part of her life

was gone—her best chance to put her hand to God's work in the world.

And besides all this, Adam Crawford was coming home with his motherless children; and though she told herself angrily that his coming was nothing to her, she could not say that she had forgotten him, and she could not say that she was not afraid.

Susan did not go to see Mrs. Crawford, feeling that the only kind of help which she was able to give was not the help the poor old lady needed most. Mark went every day, and Anne went whenever she was able, and by God's blessing brought hope and comfort to both mother and son. She was there, and so was Mark, when Adam came home, and a sad home-coming it was. When he had committed his weary, fretful children to the care of old Martha and Mary Bell, and had soothed and comforted his mother for a little while, he came and stood beside the bed on which his dying brother lay.

"He has been slumbering now and then to-day," said Anne, as she took Adam's hand. But as she spoke the sunken eyes opened and he knew his brother.

"Adam, lad!" said he, eagerly. "I have been waiting for you all this time, but it is nearly over now. Are you come home to stay? You will not go away again?"

Adam knelt down, and laid his face upon his brother's pillow.

"Oh, John! Has it come to this with you?"

“Yes—as it must come, sooner or later, to all. And Miss Anne says I need not fear. I hope, for His sake, I am forgiven and accepted; and that——”

Even as he spoke he fell into slumber again. Adam did not move.

“I trust it is well with him, Adam,” said Miss Anne, softly. “He has been graciously dealt with by a most gracious Lord and Saviour.”

And then nothing more was said till the sick man opened his eyes again.

“Are you here, Adam? You will have the land now. I have done my duty by the land. It is a good place now, but a poor portion, lad—a poor portion—when one is lying down to die. Look higher, Adam—look higher. Is my mother here—and Miss Anne? Adam, will you pray with me? I am near the brink now.”

For a single most painful moment, Miss Anne thought that Adam was going to fail his brother now. But he did not. Claspings softly but firmly the hand growing cold in his, he prayed—brokenly at first, because of the strong sobs that shook him; but he prayed as only they pray who have access to a God in whom they believe as their God and Father. A great and abiding joy took possession of Anne’s heart as she joined in his prayer. As a lad Adam had been very dear to her—almost as dear as her own sister had been—and in her simple way she had striven to

make him see the true and only Source of strength and wisdom for the life that lay before him. And whether he had seen it then or not, he saw it now, she was sure, and had found rest in Him who is mighty to save from all that can harm either in life or death.

“I am glad, Adam,” said his brother when silence fell again, and a smile so glad and bright lighted up his face that Anne for the moment thought it was his last; but he lingered still a few days, though Anne did not see him again. She went home that night altogether spent and weary, but with a joyful rest and stillness in her heart. The peaceful radiance of her face as she sat waiting for Mark to take her home was something to see. Adam Crawford saw it, and said to himself that Miss Anne was growing beautiful as she grew old. Mary Bell saw it as she folded her shawl and tied her bonnet for her, and yielding to a sudden impulse stooped and kissed her before she went away.

It did not strike Anne as a surprise that this strange beautiful girl should kiss her any more than it did when her sister, wondering at the same smiling radiance, kissed her when she welcomed her home. There were few words spoken between them that night. Susan longed to hear all that her sister had to tell, but partly because of Anne's utter weariness, and partly because it would not have been easy for her to ask about Adam

Crawford and his children, she was silent as she helped her to prepare for rest. But when she had drawn down the blind, and was going softly away, Anne called her back again.

“Susie, my darling,” said she, softly, “the goodness of the Lord is wonderful.”

“You are thinking about poor John.”

“Yes, and about Adam and Mark, and about us all. And if He were to bid me choose to-night the blessing I would most desire for you all, I would choose to leave all in His hand with never a doubt or fear.”

Then Susan stopped and kissed her again, and went away without a word.

Two days after this John Crawford drew his last weary breath, and after two days more his neighbours gathered to lay him in the grave. One's neighbours in these parts, at such a time, are the people of the whole country side when the name of the dead has been respected among them. The Crawford's man, James Watt, used afterwards to tell with curious pride that there were seven-and-sixty conveyances of one kind or another that followed his late master to the grave. Susan and Mark were there with the rest, for it is the custom for women as well as for their fathers and brothers thus to show respect for the dead.

There were prayers at the house, and a few words read and spoken, and then the long procession took its way through the quiet country, beautiful with spring verdure and

the glory of cloudless sunshine. Slowly it moved on, past the tender green of fields of springing wheat—beneath the flickering shadows of maple groves—between the close growing cedars in the hollows where the gurgle and swell of tiny “creeks” made pleasant melody. The air was full of the songs of birds and the scent of apple-blossoms, and through light of the fair day they bore him who was to be hidden away from it all.

Slowly and solemnly all the people followed to his last resting-place, speaking now and then a kindly word of the dead, pointing for each other’s benefit the solemn lesson which his death might well teach, but all the same unforgetful of their own affairs and plans—speaking also of the orchards and wheatfields, and the summer’s work that lay before them—of the rumours of passing events, the “news” that flits about wherever many people who do not often meet are gathered—glad to come back again to life and its hopes and cares, and busy working days—glad to forget death’s sad and solemn lesson.

And Mark and Susan, following with the rest, spoke of other things now and then; but through their talk and through their silence Susan was thinking her own thoughts. She was telling herself how sure she was now, and how glad that her trouble was over. The Adam Crawford she had seen standing so grave and still beside his brother’s coffin was not the Adam Crawford the thought of

whom had entered painfully into so many years of her life. Her wayward fancy had clung, and might still cling, to the remembrance of the companion of her girlhood, but of him who had returned after all these years she need not be afraid. "He was changed from the friend of old days—so changed as to seem almost a stranger," she said—a strange mingling of relief and pain coming with the knowledge. She told herself she was glad that both being so changed they could begin again, and be true friends as of old.

All through their talk and their silence, as they passed along with the rest through the fair country, she was trying to make clear to herself wherein lay the change that she saw in her friend. Was it the touch of silver in his hair—the Crawfords all grew early grey—or was it the deeper lines of care on the forehead that made him look so different? Or was it that nameless something that comes to the man from contact with a larger world, with a sense of heavier responsibilities, with a consciousness and an appreciation of assured success? Was it sorrow that had changed him?—disappointment?—bereavement?

What did it matter? The change was there marked and clear, and so Susan was sure of herself, and glad, and not afraid.

Kept back by some slower movement in the long line of carriages before them, Mark drew rein on the high hill-top that brings the village of Greenhill in sight. Over against

them the white houses of the village showed through the living green of its many trees, and lower down was the shine of sunlit water. In the valley between the hills stood the grey old church, amid its many graves and gleaming white stones, and there poor John Crawford was to be laid down in his last rest.

“On such a day as this!” said Mark, letting his eye wander over the fair sunlit country. “Oh! Sue, it seems hard, doesn’t it?”

The lad grew pale, and shivered as he turned to his sister.

“It is the common lot,” was all that Sue could answer.

“He was not an old man—not even middle-aged,” said Mark; “and what did his life amount to? And now it is done.”

It came into Susan’s mind to wish that Anne were in her place—Anne, who had always the right word ready.

“And now it is done,” said she.

“And it must come to the same with us all, sooner or later, as poor John said so many times while he lay there. Well! as you say, Sue, it is the common lot.”

“It was a foolish thing to say, dear Mark,” said his sister, gravely. “Life is God’s good gift. And if our life is what it ought to be, death will be better to us than life, whenever it may come.”

“Yes, but whose life is just what it ought to be? Not that of most people, we know.

There's Anne, indeed—a saint, if ever there was one."

"Yes, Anne. But, dear Mark, the beauty of it is this, that Anne sees nothing in herself or her life to take away the terror of death, and it has been taken away. All that makes Anne's life what it is, and which will make its last hour the gladdest hour of all, has been given to her freely, and not more freely to her than it will be given—to all—if we will have it so."

Susan spoke with difficulty, for various reasons, and chiefly for this—that she was conscious that in her brother's eyes her life must look like the lives of "most people," not just what it ought to be. But she spoke earnestly, and her brother looked at her with some surprise.

"I was not thinking of you, Sue," said he, gently.

"No, dear. But then I know I have made a poor thing of my life hitherto, and you have yours before you. It is not what we can have in life that can make us happy now, or at the end; but what God does for us—and in us."

They were moving on again by this time. Susan, thoroughly roused from the indulgence of her own thoughts, would have given much to be able to say just the right word to her brother, and the right word came, though she hardly saw it such at the moment.

"Mark, dear, be glad that you are young.

Ah! brother, you might make such a beautiful thing of your life."

Mark hung his head, poor lad. "I know I have been a fool, Sue."

"Let the dead past bury its dead," said Susan, who could not easily command words of her own when she was greatly moved, and there was no time for more.

In a little they were standing in the graveyard, and by some movement of the people to which they were obliged to yield they found themselves much nearer the grave than they had thought to be. They heard the minister's voice as he prayed, and they heard, oh! saddest of sounds, the earth fall on the coffin lid; and Susan, with the first tears she had shed that day falling like rain over her face, by the strong and loving pressure of her young brother's hand enforced unconsciously the solemn lesson. But she added no word either of warning or entreaty as they drove home together. Indeed, few words were spoken between them; but when Susan lay down to rest that night she felt her heart somewhat lightened of the burden of care she had so long borne for her brother.

"Did you see Mary Bell at the house, Sue?"

Anne asked the question in a slightly constrained manner, as though she were not quite sure that it was wise to ask it. But Sue did not seem to notice.

"No, I did not see her, and I don't think I even thought of her, or of the children."

CHAPTER III.

Tim Brady's Niece

ADAM CRAWFORD came twice to visit the sisters while he stayed at the farm. The first time Susan was away, and did not see him. The second time he brought his boys with him, and the time was so filled with the notice given them, and the talk about them, that little else passed between the old friends ; but when they went away, Susan was not so sure that Adam had changed so much from the old days after all.

It seemed that, for the present at least, Mr. Crawford could not come home to live on the farm. After a long struggle with ill-success, he had at length established a business which promised fair, and the responsibilities he had assumed could not wisely or honourably be devolved upon others for some time to come. But he looked forward to the farm as his home after a while. In the meantime he was to leave his children with his mother, in the care of Mary Bell.

“Who seems to be a sedate and capable young person,” said Mr. Crawford. “My mother thinks well of her, which is much. The boys will be far better here than in the city during the summer, and, Miss Anne, if you could give the little fellows a word of counsel now and then, as you used to give me, it would be a comfort to me.”

“I am growing an old woman now, Adam ; but we shall always be glad to see the little lads, Susan and I ; and you will think of Broadmeadows as your home all the more easily that they are here. I hope you may be soon home for good.”

Susan said nothing. She was thinking that she would like nothing better than to have the disciplining for a while of the eldest wilful little lad, who had already, during his hour's stay, found various ways of doing mischief in the house. But as to sharing responsibility with old Mrs. Crawford and Mary Bell, that was not to be thought of ; and responsibility was not to be quietly accepted at Mr. Crawford's request. So though he looked at her as well as Anne, she only said it would be a welcome break in her sister's rather monotonous life to have the children with her now and then. But in her heart she knew that their coming would be a pleasure to herself as well.

So Adam Crawford went away ; and events, as far as the sisters were concerned, fell into their old channels again. Anne was not so well as usual for a time, because she had over-exerted herself in her sympathy for her old friend and neighbour ; but she was not so ill as to cause much suffering to herself or anxiety to her sister. A little longer rest on the couch, a shorter walk in the garden, and folded hands now and then, instead of the constant knitting, made all the difference that any one could see.

As for Susan, she had plenty to do, as usual; and pleasant work that must be done is the best of all helps against either dulness or anxiety. Dulness had never been her trouble, and as the weeks went on, she began to suffer herself to hope that the deepest cause of anxiety was passing away. Mark went no more to Kavanagh Corners, which circumstance in itself did not mean much, since Mary Bell was not there. But never since the night he came in and told them that John Crawford was dying had either sister had the slightest reason to suspect that he had yielded to the temptation of strong drink.

It was Mark's misfortune—or he had always regarded it as such—that a single glass told on him, beyond his power to resist or conceal. But though Susan listened for his returning footsteps often with a trembling heart, his return had never been otherwise than as she desired. And Anne, waiting night by night in their room, read her face as she came in, and never needed to ask how it might be, but with a joyful “Thank God!” turned her cheek to her pillow, ready for rest.

It is strange, but true, that not until months had passed did the sisters exchange a word as to the hope that was dawning for their brother. It might pass away, or change to bitter sorrow any night. They feared to speak of gladness, lest grief should follow in its train; they waited and hoped in silence.

And then, there was Mary Bell. That

Mark's interest in her had something to do with his new self-control, neither of them doubted. They had both seen her before this time, and Anne had seen her more frequently than Susan. Instinctively, rather than from anything that had passed between them, the sisters knew that they would not agree in their opinions of this young girl, and it was their way to avoid discussion not likely to lead to any real result. Anne had once spoken of Mary Bell as a superior young person, and to Susan her manner had seemed to imply that she regarded her as little likely to encourage the attentions of their brother—as indeed having some right to hold herself above the lad, who, though a pleasant and handsome young fellow, had yet seen little of the world, and had little of the outward ease and readiness which contact with the world is likely to give.

Susan did not quite believe either in her superiority or in her simplicity, and held to her first opinion, that Tim Brady's niece was not a desirable person to have anything to do with in any relation of life—to say nothing of the incongruity there was in Mark Curtis offering particular attentions to a servant in a neighbour's house.

But Susan knew well enough that the last idea was a foolish one; that there was nothing in the position occupied by Mary Bell in Mrs. Crawford's house to affect her injuriously in the opinion of any sensible person, in a community

where it was the custom for the farmer who had many daughters kindly to permit, during busy seasons, the services of some of them to farmers who had none—there being not the slightest difference made or imagined in the position of those who went and those who stayed at home.

Besides, the difference must be in Mary Bell's favour in the opinion of the wise and sober-minded. For she had left an easy life and plenty in a house where she might be supposed to have a claim, and had shown herself able to manage her own affairs, and do well the work she had undertaken, though evidences were not wanting that it was a kind of work that had never been required of her before. She was "a superior young person" in the eyes of many a one besides sister Anne, Susan could not fail to know; but she had little opportunity of judging for herself, for Mary Bell, shy to all strangers, was especially shy to her, and, on the few occasions when they met, made no advances towards acquaintance. But whether Mary Bell had anything to do with it or not, it became clear, as the summer wore on, that a change for the better was being wrought in Mark. Susan watched and waited night by night, still afraid to be glad; but Anne did not need to wait for her coming in to let herself go to rest in peace, for long before Susan's doubts were set at rest, Anne was rejoicing over her brother in her heart. She rejoiced with trembling indeed, but as Sue

said to herself, Anne's trembling joy was a better thing to see than another's certain triumph; and she too took courage at last to hope that it was all coming right with her brother in the best sense, and even the thought of Mary Bell was not suffered to trouble her.

James Watt up at Mrs. Crawford's noticed it too, and he had a good chance to do so; for, to James' surprise and indignation, Mr. Crawford had told him before he went away that he was to consult young Mr. Curtis with regard to the management of the farm.

To tell the truth, it seemed very much like a joke to Mark himself when Adam asked him to take some oversight of the work of the farm for the summer. But it was rather a pleasant thing to do for various reasons, and being of a frank and kindly nature, it was done in a way that did not offend James' self-respect, or even his vanity, which was likely to be more easily hurt. With an open letter from Mr. Crawford in his hand, and with as grave a face as he could assume, the lad would discuss times and seasons for this work and that which was to be done, giving his opinion and directions with sufficient clearness and decision, but ready at the same time to defer to the maturer judgment and larger experience of the older man.

In truth, Watt did not need much oversight. He was faithful and industrious, though he was not very bright. He had never been a very good manager for himself,

but he had been for years a faithful servant to the Crawfords. He had a good place, and meant to keep it; and so yielded with moderate grumbling to the new order of things.

So Mark was often at the Crawfords' place during the summer. Susan was right in thinking that he went there all the more readily for the chance of seeing Mary Bell, but he did not see her very often. Even old Martha, who was inclined to be critical, not to say severe, where young and pretty girls were concerned, saw nothing to find fault with in Mary Bell, as far as Mark Curtis, or any other of the young men who might be suspected of passing that way on her account, was concerned. "A sedate and capable young person," Mrs. Crawford still found her. Indeed, she was a favourite with all in the house, and meant to stay there during the summer, though her uncle and aunt, beginning to fear that she would forsake them altogether, were offering her many inducements to return to them again.

Mark's home affairs were not neglected because of his attention to the doings of James Watt, or of any one else. John Grier began to feel that there was once more a master on the place, and things began to have a different look upon it. The neighbours noticed it, and the passers-by—the people who had smiled, or shaken their heads, when they heard that Mr. Crawford had left the oversight of James Watt and the farm to him.

“Miss Anne and Miss Sue would make a man of the young fellow yet,” they said.

But Miss Anne and Miss Sue had less to do with the change in Mark's manner of life than these good people who took so much interest in him supposed. For during all the waywardness and folly of the past year they had said little to him. But Anne had prayed for him night and day, and Susan had kept her patience wonderfully through all his nightly folly and daily peevishness and unreasonableness, and restrained herself, and withheld, in a way that was not usual with her, any contemptuous allusion to the weakness and wickedness of his course. “He is only a boy,” she had said to herself, and waited. And now it came to her with a constant odd sense of surprise and pleasure that he was taking a man's place among them.

And yet in the house and with his sisters he was far more like a boy than he had ever been with them before. He was no longer on the defensive with Sue, as had been his way the last year. He had been wont at times to assert himself and his mastership in a way that was neither manly nor kind. But all that was different now.

“I wonder why?” said Susan to herself, long before she said anything about it to Anne. “Can it be that the wonderful change for which Anne has been praying and waiting all this time has begun in him? Or is it only Mary Bell? I wonder if Adam and his

letters can have anything to do with it? He is very different, whatever may be the cause. I should like to get a look at one of these long epistles that he seems to value so highly."

But she never did. Mark was shy of speaking about himself, and his sister could hardly ask him about his correspondence. But by-and-by she spoke to Anne.

"Anne dear," said she one day, as she came suddenly into the room where her sister was sitting, "I thought for a minute that the rain was over, because of the sunshine on your face. What new blessing has come to you to-day to make your heart glad and light up your eyes like that?"

"Nothing new, dear, except as God's goodness is 'new every moment.'"

"And the darkest cloud is lifting from our sky—isn't that it, dear?"

"Even you see it now, Susie?"

"It is perhaps soon to say it, but lately, once or twice, I have had the strangest, pleasantest feeling at my heart—a feeling of pride in our Mark. It is coming all right with him now, isn't it, Anne?"

"But I never really feared for Mark. He was only a lad, and we had God's promise. Only in my faithlessness I was looking farther for it. I thought perhaps it might not be while I was here to see it."

Susan looked wistfully at her sister.

"Anne, do you think that a new life has begun in him, and that we need not be afraid

any more? Or is it only Mary Bell? Has he said anything to you?"

Mark had said no more to one sister than to the other; but yet because of the difference between the two he had almost unconsciously shown more of his heart to Anne. And then Anne, waiting and expecting an answer to her hourly prayers for him, had her eyes open to see in him what was hidden to the no less loving, but less hopeful Susan.

"He has said nothing to me, dear, in words. But I do trust he is being led in the right way. 'Is it Mary Bell?' you ask. It may be that she has helped—in a way. And, Adam, too—by trusting him and writing to him. And poor John's death sobered him. And, Susie, though he has said little to me in words, he has said thus much—that he was getting tired of his idle, purposeless life, and glad of a helping hand out of it. But whether it was Mary Bell he meant, or Adam, or both together, I cannot tell. The little lads, of whom he is so fond, have helped him. But it is the Lord alone who can give him the best blessing, and keep him safe—and He will do it, I believe."

"And you haven't room in your heart for a single hour's anxiety as to what is to become of us, when some one else shall come to take our place, and we shall have to go away?"

"No. Have you?" asked Anne with a smile.

"Ah! well! I haven't the faith which

removes mountains, Anne dear. But nothing very bad can happen to me as long as I have you."

"No; nor after."

"We will not speak of 'after,' " said Susan, gravely.

But it was at the very end of summer when all this was said—a summer which, for other reasons than the hope she had in Mark, was a happy one for Susan. Her heart was lighter than it had been for years, and she said to herself it was good to learn to live just from day to day, taking no thought for the morrow or what it might bring.

Anne thought the little Crawfords had done something for Mark, but they had done more for Susan, though in a different way. Mark spoiled them to their hearts' content, humouring every whim—ready any hour to go far and wait long to do them a pleasure. Not so Susan. The very first glimpse she had got of Adam's wilful little Jack, there had risen in her mind a strong desire to have the disciplining of him for a little while. It was the instinct of the schoolmistress, not dead in her yet, she said, that made her wish to bring into proper subjection to law and order the child who too evidently had been accustomed to govern rather than to obey.

Early in the summer an unexpected opportunity occurred for Susan to try her power and skill in subduing the little rebel. Ever since coming to the farm, she had taught in the

farm-house kitchen on Sunday afternoons a class of little children who were too young to be sent with their brothers and sisters to the Sunday-school in the village. She had begun with two or three of the children of their nearest neighbours, but of late their numbers had increased, till nearly a score of little people came together; and one Sunday, soon after Mr. Crawford went away, Mark, without saying anything to his sisters beforehand, brought little Jack into the midst of the band.

The exercises were very simple: all the children joined with Miss Anne in repeating the "Lord's Prayer," each repeated a verse of Scripture or of a hymn, and then Miss Susan told them stories chiefly, from the Bible, and then they all sang. It must be confessed that the chief interest to them all was in the singing. They were troubled with no lessons or reading-books; indeed, the greater part of them were quite too young for that; but they could all sing in their own fashion. And a pretty thing it was to see and hear them. It cannot be said that the order was always perfect, but Miss Susan had them in perfect subjection.

CHAPTER IV.

A Blessing in Disguise.

CHRISTMAS-TIME drew near, bringing wintry weather, and, as does not always happen in that part of Canada, snow enough for good sleighing, that pleasantest of all modes of locomotion. Susan stood ready at the door waiting for her brother who was to drive her to the town of Langton, partly for their mutual pleasure, and partly to make some purchases which the holiday season demanded, and which were beyond the resources of Kavanagh Corners, and even of Greenhill stores.

Anne could not be persuaded to go with them because she feared to face the cold, and because she was not quite without fear of Mark's gay young horses, and their too rapid movements over the snow.

"But I shall enjoy the thought that you are having a good time. I wish there were some one else to take the empty seat, and enjoy it with you."

"We shall call at the Crawfords' and take the boys along," said Mark. "I promised them their first sleigh drive."

"You will have to be responsible for the boys when Susan is in the stores," said Anne, seeing her sister's doubtful looks.

But Susan was thinking that possibly Mark might like to take someone else for a first sleigh drive, and she was trying to make up

her mind to propose that they should ask Mary Bell as well as the boys. But she said nothing.

“If such is his intention he will not mind me,” thought she.

It was not his intention apparently, for when they came to the Crawfords’ gate he said he was obliged to speak to Watt, and would drive on to the upper barn, and be back again at the gate by the time she came out with the boys. So a little relieved, and a little disappointed, too—for Sue’s thoughts of Mary Bell had changed of late—she went up the path to the house. The door was open, and a sudden sharp cry from little Jack reached her ear; and before she was aware of it Susan found herself looking on a scene that startled her, and made her draw back out of view.

Adam Crawford was standing in the room, holding firmly with his left hand the screaming child, while his right was laid on the beautiful white arm of Mary Bell. He was not looking at Jack, but smilingly into the girl’s face. She was eagerly regarding little Jack, expostulating and entreating, it seemed, and Susan heard her saying, with her pretty Irish accent:

“And what will Miss Susan say when she hears what a naughty boy you have been? Sure, you promised you would never, never bite any one again. And now you will grieve her sadly.”

Sure enough, there were the marks of little teeth on the pretty arm that Mr. Crawford was holding; even at that distance Susan could see them. As to its grieving her she was not sure at the moment. Her first impulse was to snatch the child from his father's grasp and carry him away with her; her second wiser thought was to get away unscen; and when Mark returned he found her outside the gate waiting alone.

"Jack has been naughty," said she. "He must not have the pleasure of a drive to-day."

"Oh! nonsense, Sue. You are too hard on the boy. I promised him. What has he done? You can punish him afterwards, you know, but let him come now."

"No, I shall not punish him. His father will doubtless do that. He has returned. The boy has bitten Mary Bell's beautiful arm, it seems, and does not look sorry. I think, on the whole, we should leave him at home to-day."

"The little rascal. I hope it is not very bad?"

"It is not beyond cure, I think," said Sue. A strange pained look came into her face as she met her brother's glance.

"Has he got to go through it all?" said she to herself, bitterly.

"What is it, Sue?" said Mark, wondering.

"I think we should go, Mark, unless you wish to see Mr. Crawford. If you do I can go home again."

“No, I can wait. We will go on to Langton, and as Jack did not expect the drive it matters less. And he must be broken of that naughty trick, surely.”

So they drove away, and there was silence between them for a good many miles. Susan thought of the day when they sat together on the hill-top watching the long procession that followed John Crawford to the grave. How sure they had grown to be of their brother since then! How glad and thankful for the change that had come to him within the year! And why did her heart sink so utterly down in thinking of what might lie before him? Was it only Mary Bell who had been influencing him for good all this time, so that if she were to put herself beyond his reach—quite out of his life—the old temptation would come back again, bringing the old misery? Why did this fear come back so sharply to her now?

The smiling admiration she had seen in Adam Crawford's eyes seemed like a revelation to her—the foreshadowing of a sorrowful future to him and to them all. For what could Mark do against Adam Crawford, and how could the poor lad bear a blow so painful coming from his friend? Susan had no thought of herself at this moment. It did not come into her mind that Adam Crawford, or Mary Bell, or their plans and prospects, could touch her life in any way, except through Mark, her brother, who might be made to

suffer by them. Even the pain that came with the remembrance of the past came in the form of pain for her brother. If she had missed the work and pleasure of her life because of her own mistake, how much worse would it be for him, should this trouble come upon him ! How could he meet the manifold temptations and dangers which had assailed him before, and which would find him again less able to meet them safely than ever ?

Unless, indeed, Anne were right, and the new life were begun in him—the life which strength from without sustains—which the highest wisdom guides — the holiest love blesses.

“ And even then the pain will hurt,” said Susan, with a sigh. “ Oh, if I could only help him ! ”

Looking up at her brother’s bright unconscious face, Susan took a sudden resolution.

“ Mark,” said she, “ why have you never told us about Mary Bell ? ”

Mark gave a little start of surprise, and then he said gravely :

“ Because I did not think you would care to hear, Sue. And, besides, there is not much to tell.”

“ I would care, certainly. And I think you ought to tell us—Anne and me, if you are going to ask her to be your wife.”

“ I have asked her already, long ago, and more than once, if you care to hear about it.”

“ Well ? ” said his sister, a little startled.

"She wouldn't have me—and small blame to her," said the poor boy, hanging his head.

"But why?"

"Oh! you know why, well enough. I wasn't fit to tie her shoe, let alone anything else."

"Did she tell you so?"

"No—not in words. She told me if I came back in 'a year and a day,' and would say that I had never tasted liquor, or touched a card, or made a bet in the meantime, I might have a right to a hearing from an honest girl; and I'll have that right anyhow."

"And you'll go?"

"I'll go, *sure*. I know I am not good enough for her, Sue; but I would try to be a better man, and make her happy," said Mark, humbly.

"And if she won't have you, Mark?"

The young man was silent for a minute or two.

"I would try and take it like a man, I hope, but one can never be sure. I think I would sell the place, and go away."

"Would it be so bad as that, dear?"

"I am afraid so. But I think, after all, I would not sell the old place. I might leave the farm with you. You have it in you to make a good farmer, or anything else—that is easy seen.

"No, Mark. I would like best to go away with you—somewhere, and begin a new life.

"I don't think I could stay and farm your land, and you away."

"But then there is Anne. She could never go away, and you would never leave her. You would like farming, Sue. And if Adam Crawford should settle down on his place, he would help you with your business where a man's help was needed. You would make a grand farmer, Sue, and you could not leave Anne."

"No, I could not leave Anne. And even if I could, a woman cannot wander about the world in search of adventures, or to make a fortune. I dare say I should be best at home."

Mark, having his lips opened, had much to say about Mary Bell and her perfections, and Sue listened, saying little, but gathering from her brother's words that though he had very humble thoughts of himself, and many doubts as to how he might speed with his wooing when the "year and a day" should be over, he feared no special rival, least of all the rivalry of Adam Crawford.

"You might be a little friendly with her, Sue. I am sure you would like her, and it might make a difference. She thinks you are quite wonderful for goodness and cleverness, I can tell you.

"Oh! she does, does she?" said Sue. But she made no promise.

Her shopping was not a success, as far as the pleasure of it was concerned, but it was

got through at last. The day altogether was a weary one ; partly because they were long detained waiting for a friend to whom Mark had promised a drive as far as Greenhill, and the presence of a third person prevented any further confidences between them. Susan was glad enough when the light in the windows came in view.

The first voice she heard was that of little Jack, who was waiting for them on the doorstep, though the darkness was beginning to fall.

“Miss Susan, why didn’t you take me? Was it because I was naughty? I’m sorry, Miss Sue, and I’m good now.”

He clambered into the sleigh, and Miss Sue clasped and kissed him without a word.

“I’m good now, and Mark will let me go with him to the stable,” said Jack, doing his best to get free. Of course, Mark was only too glad of his company.

“You are tired, Susie,” said Anne, when she saw her face.

“Very tired and cold—very cold,” shivering and stooping down to warm her hands at the fire.

Mark came in by-and-by with little Jack. It gave Susan a mingled feeling of anger and pain to witness her brother’s delight at the return of Mr. Crawford. They had much to say to each other, and every word and look of the younger man showed how much he admired and liked his friend. Anne put

in a word now and then, but Susan sat in the shadow, almost in silence, with a headache from the fatigue of the day, she said, and by-and-by she rose and bade them good-night.

“But first I must give you my mother’s message,” said Mr. Crawford, detaining her. “Can you all come up and pass Christmas Day with us? I think my dear mother is afraid of the day, as indeed I am myself; and it will be true charity for you all to come and help us through it.”

Mark expressed himself delighted with no hesitation. Susan said something about her doubts as to Anne’s being able, but Anne accepted cheerfully for them all.

But neither Anne nor Susan left her own home on Christmas Day. Susan had taken cold, it seemed, when she drove with her brother to Langton, and did not find it easy to get rid of it. She was not very ill—at least she was not very ill at first. But the doctor looked grave when, after a longer delay than was wise, they sent for him. He insisted on a nurse being engaged at once; and though he allowed Susan to believe that this was chiefly for Anne’s sake, lest she should suffer from her care of her, all the rest could see that he thought her illness might prove a serious one.

Poor Susan! the trouble which she had never feared had fallen on her. She made a brave but vain stand against it. She who

had hardly ever experienced an hour's sickness lay helpless through languid days and feverish nights, never quite unconscious, and never so delirious but that a word would recall her to herself, but full when awake of strange and almost always painful fancies, and falling asleep only to be wearied by troubled dreams.

When first the thought came to her that she might be going to die, she was glad.

"A good way out of it all," she said to her startled sister. "I never did much with my life, and I don't suppose I ever should now. There is only you who would miss me, Anne; and you would not be long till you came."

"It is all in good hands, dear," said Anne, soothingly. "All will be well, whether it be life or death."

"Yes, I hope it may be well. I am not worthy; but then—it is not our worthiness that can save us. I should be content with a very humble place—just to be at rest."

But by-and-by, when the fever was over, and only utter weakness remained, that did not pass away as time went on—when she read in the anxious looks of those who were about her that the hope of her recovery was growing fainter, she grew afraid.

"I am not sure of myself," she said. "I am not ready to die. What evidence have I ever given that I belong to God? I have sought my own will first, I have not loved Him best, or served Him; and what right

have I to think that He will receive me now?"

After a while she said something like this to Anne.

"Only the right that He gives, dear; and if your life had been all that you wish now it had been, it would have been the very same. Heaven is His gift, freely given for Christ's sake."

"Yes, to His own. But am I His? I am not like you, Anne. The things which have been your meat and drink always were never, I fear, real to me. I am afraid when I look back."

"But, dear, why should you look back? His grace and promise are for to-day; and the sorer your need, the surer His promise."

"Ah! His promise! But, Anne, the promises you lived on in those days were to me just words in a book. I took a sort of comfort from them, but it almost seems now as though it was only because there was something else I wanted and could not have."

Anne looked at her in silence, not knowing what to reply; indeed, not sure that she ought to say anything to her in her present weak state.

"Rest now, dear. You are not strong enough to speak, and try not to weary yourself by thinking just now. Wait till you are stronger."

"But, Anne, if I am going to die, ought

I not to think about it? I am not sure of myself—and I—am afraid.”

“My dear, I can trust you in God’s hands for life or death,” said Anne smiling, but with tears.

“Did you use to think I was a Christian in those days? Oh! how long ago it seems now! But I was not always sure myself. I did not take the comfort of it. Yes, I know—I lived like a Christian, as you say, and did what I could for the sick and the poor, and for the children—wishing for them first of all that they should be good. But did I do it for Christ’s sake? I am not sure. I liked to do it, and there was nothing else. Even in those days I knew that to be Christ’s was the only happiness, but I was not always glad to know it. I longed for something else. If I had been His servant really—with my heart in His work, and my hands full of it—would not that have been enough? I needed to keep myself up to the mark even then, and I never succeeded—never.”

“But, my darling, who ever did succeed in living up to the perfect example, or even to one’s own imperfect ideal? And even if one could—even if you had done so—it is not that to which you would look now, on which you would depend, which would make you safe, living or dying. I need not tell you that, dear.”

“I know. Even you, Anne, who are so much better than I, will only get heaven as

a gift, as will all Christians. But I am not sure that I am a Christian; I have never been sure."

"But, my Susie, it is not of yourself that you are to think at a time like this, it is of your Saviour. Is He able to save you? Is He willing? And are you willing to be saved? Weak as you are, how can you go back and examine yourself, and the evidence you gave of Christian life, and why should you? Why should any one? Christ is able to save. Christ is willing to save to-day. And even if you never came to Him before, you may come now. Full of sin—utterly unworthy, weary and helpless—you are the very one He has promised to receive."

Anne spoke earnestly, with tears. Her sister repeated the words after her.

"Able and willing. Utterly unworthy—wearied and helpless—the very one He has promised to save."

She shut her eyes wearily, and there was a long silence between them. Mark came in for his daily visit and went away again. Anne lay down for her hour's rest, and afterwards sat again beside her. Then Susan said softly, as if there had been no interval, and she was thinking of her sister's last words.

"Yes, if I could come to Him like that, and then die, that would be best."

"My darling, do we know what is best? Can we not leave all that in His hands? If living and dying you are His, what does it matter whether you live or die?"

“If I were like you, Anne. If I were sure of myself!”

“Am I sure of myself? If I am, it is because Jesus is ‘mighty to save.’ And He is your Saviour as well as mine—coming to Him now, even though you had never come before.”

“Yes. And then, though I am afraid to die, I am also afraid to live. It does not seem as though I could go back to the old doubts and dissatisfactions again. I never have done anything with my life. I should do no better now, though I were well again, and had another chance.”

Anne smiled and said nothing.

“I know what you are thinking, Anne. But you never really knew me, though we lived all our lives together. Your thoughts were higher than mine always. I was often dissatisfied, sick of my life, when I said nothing to you. I see now how wrong I was; but it might be the same again. There has been nothing in my life to count.”

She always came to this, till Anne, fearing that in her weak state it might become a fixed idea with her, ceased to reason with her or to answer her at all. She had long and most loving patience with her, weary and weak as she often herself was; dealing gently and firmly with her, as one would deal with a sick and fretful child, for Susan was quite broken and helpless.

“I shall never be strong again. Why should I live to be burdensome to you? and yet I am afraid to die.

This was her daily and nightly thought, and there was more danger than Anne knew that by dwelling upon it her health both of mind and body might suffer permanently. They were at this time a melancholy household. Though Anne's cheerfulness never failed, her strength failed often beyond her power to hide; and Susan, who had been her strength and comfort through years of helplessness, could not see her suffering unmoved. Mark was grave and preoccupied with troubles of his own, though they hardly noticed it at first till some words of Mr. Crawford's called Anne's attention to him.

The old lady was in trouble herself. Mary Bell's aunt, Mrs. Brady, was ill; and though Mary had steadily refused to live in a house where much that was open to disapproval was carried on, she could not refuse to go there to help in a time of need, and Mrs. Crawford was left with the two little boys on her hands.

"Which would have been a small matter when I was younger, or if they had been taught to be helpful to themselves and others, as my boys were taught," said Mrs. Crawford; "but Martha has no patience with them, and won't take steps for them. And indeed I have not much patience myself; and as for taking steps, my days for that are past. If Susan had been well, I should have asked you to have them here for a spell, till Adam

makes up his mind how he is going to manage for them."

Susan was fit for no such care now, Anne said; but Mark, when she appealed to him, was not so sure.

"It would do her good, Anne, and you too. I am sure it would do me good to have Jack here for a while. Both of them might be too much, and they can keep the little fellow up there. I say, Anne, let us have Jack here for a day or two, and don't tell Sue beforehand. It is thinking about things that tires her out. Let me go and get Jack, and if he should be troublesome we can send him home again."

"It is a pity Mary Bell had to go away," said Anne, afraid to consent, yet not liking to refuse her brother. "If it were only for a day or two we might think about it."

"A pity! I should think so!" said Mark, heeding only her first words. "It was 'her duty,' she said, and you can't make her budge from that, whatever happens."

Though his words sounded complimentary, he spoke angrily, Anne thought.

"Have you seen her since she left Mrs. Crawford's?"

"No, I haven't. I have been down there, but she told me before she went away that I need not come, for the chances were she wouldn't see me. I said I would go on the chance, but she told me flatly that she wouldn't have me going there and making

her the excuse. I suppose she thinks I am a fool, that can be dealt with by Tim Brady and the lot of them, and that it would not be safe for me to go there."

Anne was surprised to hear Mark speaking in this way. He was angry and anxious too, or he would not have done it, poor fellow—longing for sympathy, yet very likely to resent it. Anne was silent for a moment, not knowing what to say.

"I think Jack would do you good, Mark. I cannot answer for Sue; but Mary Bell does not think that I am unfriendly, I am quite sure. And, Mark, dear, I don't think you need fret because she does not care to have you coming and going about Brady's place."

"She thinks I am not able to resist temptation, that is it. The only wonder is that I ever could have been led into trouble by such a miserable set."

"'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall,' " said Anne, gently.

"Yes, I know. I don't wonder that you don't trust me, or Mary either," said Mark, humbly. "But I hope and believe that I shall never fall into that slough again, God helping me."

"I do trust you, dear. Why should I fear for you, God helping you?" said Anne, just touching his strong brown hand with her slender fingers. "Don't fret, dear, but go and get little Jack, and I shall say nothing

to Sue till he is fairly here. He may do her good, as you say."

In the afternoon, more for the sake of having something to say than anything else, Anne told her sister about Mrs. Brady's illness, and how Mary Bell had gone home to nurse her; and without meaning to do so, she let Susan see that Mark was troubled and vexed about it.

"Is it only that she has gone there, do you think, Anne? or is there anything else the matter?"

"Well, I suppose if Mark were sure of his ground with her, he would not mind so much."

"But he is not sure," said Susan, gravely.

Mark brought little Jack up that night, and his coming, or something else, did Sue good, Mark said; for when he came in the morning, telling her that a heavy shower of snow had fallen, making the sleighing for the time almost as good as ever, though March was half over, she proposed that he should drive her as far as the village.

"You are getting better, Sue," said he a little wistfully, for in her wraps she looked a sad contrast to the bright sister he had driven at Christmas-time.

"Since I am not going to die, I must do my best to get strong again," said she.

"And doing one's best is more than half the battle in a case like yours," said Mark, cheerfully.

"Much you know about it," said Sue.

CHAPTER V.

Brighter Hopes.

BUT Susan did get better, little by little, from that day. Jack did her no harm, but much good. She would not have had the strength or courage to enter into any serious conflict with him had he chosen to be naughty in the old way. In his pretty childish way he made much of Miss Sue because she was sick, and did what he could to comfort her; and he grew very dear to her in those days.

By-and-by there came, in a letter to Mark, many and earnest acknowledgments from Mr. Crawford to the sisters for their kindness to his little son. He had been at home a good while at Christmas, anxious, like all the rest, because of Miss Susan's illness; but he had never seen her since the night that she and Mark had found him at their house when they came home from Langton. Now he congratulated them all on her recovery, saying how glad he was for Miss Anne's sake that this great trouble was over.

"I do not dare to think how it would have been with Miss Anne had she lost her sister. Thank God that she is spared," wrote Adam.

"But she does not look as if she were 'out of the wood' yet. Does she, Anne?" said Mark, a little anxiously, as Susan leaned

back with closed eyes, very pale and worn-looking.

"She is better, dear," said Anne. "When the fine days come and the ground dries, so that she can go about the farm with you again, she will be all right."

"Yes, indeed, and before that time, I hope. I am almost well already."

She was so much better that she did not shrink from the thought of exertion, as she had always hitherto done; and when the doctor, who still came to see her now and then, again suggested that all she needed to restore her strength was a complete change of air and scene for a little while, she made no objections at the time, and afterwards returned to the subject with Anne.

"I must get strong before the spring work begins. Think of the milk, and the calves, and the lambs, to say nothing of the sewing I shall have to do. I think I will go and visit Martha Cuthbertson for a little. She has asked me often enough, and at this time of the year they are less likely to have a houseful of visitors than at any other time. I think she will be glad to see me."

Martha Jennings had been a pupil of Anne's and a companion of Susan's many years ago; indeed she had been a dear friend of both. She was several years older than Susan, and had married early, and had a large family of sons and daughters growing up about her, and was a happy woman, with all the cares and

pleasures which a large and healthy household of children bring.

"It is as good a place as any," said Susan, as Anne hesitated and looked doubtful; "and the doctor thinks I ought to go away somewhere. I will write to-day."

The letter was written, and a cordial answer received almost immediately.

"Why cannot Anne come too? I know it will not be easy for her to spare you. Cannot she come too?"

But this was not to be thought of; Anne was better at home, she said. She was not equal to the fatigue of visiting, even if she could be spared from home.

"I mean to come home well and strong, if possible, and the sooner I go the better," said Susan.

Her heart failed her a little when the time came, but Anne was courageous for both.

"I am glad you are going, dear, very glad. You will come home stronger and brighter in every way. Martha Cuthbertson and her young people will do you a world of good."

She shook her head.

"If you have failed, Anne, I am afraid no one will do me good."

"I know, dear, I cannot help you, and you cannot help yourself, but you know who can. You have nothing to do about it but to wait and look. Don't you remember, dear?—'We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same

image from glory to glory.' Only keep your face turned toward Him, and there is no fear. All will be well."

Only "to wait and look." The words touched Susan's heart, and kept her waking a while that last night at home. Would that do it? Would just "waiting and looking" change her from the "self" of which she had grown so weary into the image of the Lord whom she loved and sought to serve?

For she did love Him, she said to herself with a gush of tears, in the source of which there was both shame and gladness—shame that she had loved so little, gladness in the knowledge that He loved so much.

"Changed! That is just what I need. And there is hope if just 'waiting and looking' will do it. It is His work. I knew it before in a way. I will look to Him. And, O dear Lord, look upon me and make me like Thyself, and nothing else will matter much."

This was the beginning of good things for Susan, and having come to this, it did not much matter whether she stayed at home or went away.

Mark was to take her to the nearest railway station, and his plan was to put off her going till the day when Mr. Crawford was expected home, so that one journey might serve. But Susan firmly opposed this plan.

"The sooner I go the sooner I shall be home; and think how much there will be to do in a few weeks." And so she went.

Mrs. Cuthbertson lived in the pretty and thriving town of G——. Her husband was a successful business man, kind and indulgent to his family, and all the comfort that moderate wealth liberally and judiciously dispensed could bring into a house was theirs. There was more than comfort; many luxuries were enjoyed by the family and their visitors. Their house was much frequented both in summer and in winter. Just now some cousins, lively young people, were staying with them, and there was much coming and going of the young folks of the town. The house was quite gay, and at times just a little noisy for Susan in her present state of health. However, a little of the merry youthful movement carried on was good for her, and she need have no more of it than she chose. She had always her own room, and, better still, she always found a kind welcome in the pleasant apartment where “Grandmamma Cuthbertson” spent most of her time.

With Mrs. Cuthbertson and her happy household of young people my story has little to do, but the lives of the old lady and Susan touched each other for a little time to the good of both, and through this Anne’s prayers for her sister were answered.

Old Mrs. Cuthbertson had been the great lady of G—— in her day. She was a stately and dignified old lady still, exacting and receiving much attention from her family and friends;

but it did not take many visits to her room to let Susan see that she was not a very happy old lady. She had not fallen into complaining or querulousness, as old people who are not happy are apt to do. She said it was right that she should content herself with the inevitable lot of old age. She had had her day, and had as little to regret in her life as most people. But when she added that it was drawing to a close, and that she must pass away and be forgotten, there was a look of sadness on her face that struck Susan painfully.

"It is like a dream, my life as I look back upon it," said she. "It might have been a better life. There are some things that it is not pleasant to look back upon, but I trust they may not be laid to my charge. We have a merciful God to deal with, and it is well for us that it is so."

"Yes, it is well," said Susan, scarcely knowing what to say. But she thought of her sister's beaming face as she once spoke to her of "the few days, at the most, of this life, and of the rest in God's love for ever."

"If Anne were here instead of me, she would surely have some word of comfort for the poor soul; but how can I say anything—I who know so little myself?"

"They say, that when death draws near the fear of it passes away," went on the old lady. "I trust it may be so with me. You have been very ill lately, Miss Susan, have

you not? Did you think you were going to die? Were you afraid?"

Susan did not answer at once.

"Yes, I was afraid. I was not sure—that it was well with me."

"And afterwards—was the fear taken away? Surely you need not have been afraid?"

"I was afraid."

"But nearly all your life you have professed to be a Christian. You have loved God, and have sought to serve Him. Imperfection must, of course, enter into all service. But why should you have been afraid? Is there no such thing as confidence at a time so awful?"

Susan was silent for a little while, asking herself whether she could tell her all that she had gone through in those days. The life and experience of the old lady had been so different from hers, it was not likely that this would help her, and it would not be an easy thing to do. By-and-by Mrs. Cuthbertson repeated the question.

"Why were you afraid?"

"Anne told me it was because I was looking at myself—at what I had been, and at what I had done, and left undone. There could be no comfort in that, even if I had done more and sinned less. It is only to 'Christ our Righteousness' that we must look. 'I shall fear no evil, for Thou art with me,' David says."

"Yes, if we know ourselves to belong to His flock."

“Yes, but even if we do not know it certainly, we can only come to Him as though we had never come before, even at the very last hour.”

Susan spoke with difficulty.

“And were you comforted? Looking to Him, was the fear taken away?”

“I got better, you know. But I hope—I believe if I were to be laid down again—I could trust myself in His hands.”

There was no word spoken for a long time, and then as Susan rose to go Mrs. Cuthbertson said gently,

“Are you busy to-day? Will you have time to read to me a little while?”

Her hand lay on the large Bible at her side, and Susan opened it. She only read a few words, the twenty-third Psalm, and the story of the man “who had an infirmity thirty and eight years,” and little more was said that day. But every day after that, while she remained in the house, Susan read to her old friend; and through the reading, and through the talk to which the reading opened the way, came comfort and clearness of view to them both.

It was not that they had very much that was new to say to each other, and what Susan said was never given as her own; and it was only the simplest truths of the Gospel that she thus uttered. But the simplest truths are the grandest. How Jesus came to save His people from their sins; how He is their life, their

strength, their righteousness ; how ever looking unto Him they may grow in likeness to Him even here ; and how afterwards, in the place prepared, they shall “see Him as He is.”

“As a little child !” Susan said to herself often, as she saw the eagerness and simplicity with which the dear old lady received the Word. It was not that she was hearing things which she had never heard before, but they came to her with power, and were new in a sense. She had lived not altogether a worldly life, but the world with its cares and enjoyments—what it had given her and what she hoped from it—came between her and her duty to God, and her enjoyment of Him. She had not had “the single eye” in His service, and there the light that was in her had been dimness, if it had not been altogether “darkness.”

Like Susan, she had not taken the good of her religion. In the days of youth and health, and amid the cares and pleasures of middle life, she had hardly missed it. But when middle life passed, and old age drew on—when one by one the strong ties that bound her to the world were broken or weakened—when her natural courage began to fail under the weight of increasing infirmity—she grew vaguely conscious that that which she had been accustomed to speak of as the only true source of strength and comfort failed to give either strength or comfort to her.

It was with her as it had been with Susan

in this also, that the promises of God, which she had seen to be the staff and stay in times of trouble of some, she knew were to her “words written in a book.” The Book, indeed it was, which she had been taught to reverence from her youth, whose truths she believed in and relied upon as the only guide through this world to a better. But though she seemed to see and feel their worth—to know them as the sure word of God—she could not grasp them, and lean her whole weight upon them, and know herself safe because of God’s promise through Christ to her.

She would have been shocked and pained had it been suggested to her at any period of her life that she was relying, or in danger of relying, on anything for salvation but the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ. And yet even in her old age she failed to rest peacefully upon, or even to see clearly, the grand and blessed truth that He saves His people fully and freely from their sins. Oh! the peace and rest that fell on her soul as, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the blessed knowledge dawned upon her. Where was her fear now, since she knew assuredly that her Lord had through death destroyed him that had the power of death? Seeing His face, she, too, had but “to wait and look,” and all would be well.

This was the blessing that came to her through her intercourse with Susan Curtis. And what came to Susan herself? Peace?

Yes, and rest; and joy was coming. For Susan, as she had never done before, longed that she might have no will but Christ's with regard to all things. She too, "seeing as in a glass the glory of the Lord," was longing earnestly and hopefully to be "changed into the same image, as by the Spirit of God."

"God bless you, dear! You have done me much good," said old Mrs. Cuthbertson when Susan came to say good-bye to her.

"Have I? I am sure you have done me good."

"I shall see you again," said her old friend; and Susan knew by the smile on her face that she was thinking of a meeting in "the better country," whither the faces of both were turned.

Her visit had been successful, Susan told herself on her way home. She had grown stronger, and her health had improved in every way. She had met with nothing but kindness from her friend and her family, and she had given pleasure as well as received it.

But her happiest thoughts connected with it came from the remembrance of the hours spent in old Mrs. Cuthbertson's room.

"Yes, I think we have done each other good. I am glad I made the visit, but I am glad now to go home to Anne. Now I shall begin again, and I am not afraid."

She was saying this to herself as the train drew near Broadmeadow Station, where her brother was to meet her. The first friendly

face she saw, and the first voice she heard as the speed of the train slackened, were the face and voice of little Jack. He was watching the passing train at a safe distance from it, under, evidently, Mary's guardianship.

It was not of her brother Mark that Susan thought as she saw them; and it was scarcely a surprise to her when Mr. Crawford offered his hand to help her from the train.

"You are better, Susan, I can see it without being told. I am very glad," said he.

"Oh yes! I am quite well again," said Susan, aware that there was some feeling in her heart which was neither surprise nor pleasure, and which she did not care at the moment to analyse.

Little Jack now rushed along the platform and caught hold of Susan with a cry of delight. She clasped and kissed him with a little throb of pain mingled in her delight.

"Miss Susan, did you get your sister's letter?" asked Crawford; "because—"

"I have not heard from her for a week. Has anything happened?" asked Sue.

"No, nothing new—at least, nothing unexpected. I hope you will like it. I am sure you will like Mary Bell. I should not be able to take full pleasure in this if you are not going to be pleased. I hope that——"

"But why should not I be pleased?" said Susan, pale and startled, but looking Mr. Crawford full in the face. "I do like Mary Bell; she is very beautiful.

“Yes, she came with us. And she is good as she is beautiful. I only wish that you had got Miss Anne’s letter, so you might have been prepared.”

“Oh! I think I was prepared, Mr. Crawford. Did you say Mark was here? I wonder where I can find my brother?”

All this had been said hurriedly and with interruptions, and there could be no more said at the moment. Susan yielded to the hand of little Jack, and was led out of the crowd.

“Here they are! Here is Uncle Mark!” cried the boy; and Susan turned and saw her brother with Mary Bell leaning on his arm. Mark’s face was radiant.

“My ‘year and a day’ is over, Sue,” cried he triumphantly.

Susan looked at them a moment bewildered. Then she kissed them both—Mary Bell first; they were in the waiting-room by this time.

“Oh, Mark, I am so glad!” whispered she.

“Did you know it, Sue? Had you got Anne’s letter?” said the happy Mark. “It was all that I could do to make Mary come. She was afraid you would not be glad.”

“I am very glad;” and then she kissed Mary Bell again, gazing with delight on the wonderful beauty of the girl.

Mr. Crawford had got the baggage by this time, and by-and-by, as he walked down the station with Susan, he said:

“I wonder why they all thought you would not like it? They seemed to think you were



Welcome Back.

not friendly with Mary Bell, and that you would not be pleased with Mark's success."

"I did not know her very well, and I thought—I did not think—it did not seem that she would ever care for Mark—and so—but is she not very beautiful?"

"Very beautiful. And so you were afraid for Mark, and did not like Mary Bell? But I knew the secret of each from the very first, though neither of them meant me to know it. I was sure it would all end well, and I think I helped it on a little. Miss Anne is delighted; only I think she was a little afraid of what you might say."

"She need not have been afraid. I am very glad."

The first glimpse Anne got of her sister's face set her heart at rest with regard to her.

"Well, dear?" was all she said.

"Yes, Anne. It is well now, I believe."

And that was all they had a chance to say, till their guests were gone away and the house was quiet for the night. Then Susan followed her sister into their room.

"Well, dear?" said Anne again.

"Yes, it is well. It is better than when I went away," said Susan, making an effort against her old shyness in speaking about herself and her feelings, even to Annie.

"My courage is better, anyway, and I am going to begin again. I have had a good time."

But it was about her daily readings and talks with old Mrs. Cuthbertson that she spoke

chiefly ; and Anne gathered from her manner of telling, rather than from her words, all the good they had done each other.

“ And you had a good time on the whole ? ”

“ A very good time ; but I am glad to be at home again. You can hardly think how different Martha Cuthbertson’s way of life is from ours. It is a pleasant life, too, and I might get to like it best after a while. But it is best to be at home and to have one’s own work to do. I am glad to be at home.”

There was silence for a while, and then Anne said :

“ But you are not going to be troubled about the breaking up of our home again ?—because of Mark and Mary, I mean.”

Susan laughed.

“ Mark and Mary ! How strange it seems to hear you say the names together so ! No, I don’t think I shall be troubled ; I have not thought about it. It will be all right, I guess, Anne, since Mark is happy. I am very glad for Mark. Do you know, Anne, Mark once told me that if Mary Bell would have nothing to say to him he would go away, and leave me to carry on the farm. I could have done it too, I think, with John Grier’s help. I am glad it is as it is, however ; and as for being troubled, I don’t believe I shall let myself be troubled about anything for a while.”

CHAPTER VI.

Susan's Decision.

SUSAN had not much temptation to indulge an anxious spirit, for a while, even had she not been less inclined to do so than of old. A few happy weeks passed by. They had the pleasures of last summer, without its anxieties, she said. It seemed to her that the country had never looked so beautiful before, and that she had never taken such delight in the growing things of wood and field and garden.

The walks she had with her brother to the farthest corners of the farm tired her often, but she was always ready for the next. They were not spoiled, as some of them had been last summer, by the thought of Mary Bell, though her name came now into their talk apropos of almost everything seen, and done, and planned by them. Mark was never tired of the theme, and though his sister wondered a little at what she was inclined to call his folly, and laughed at him now and then, there was none of the bitterness in her heart that had troubled her last summer.

Indeed, one of the chief pleasures of these months was her acquaintance with Mary.

"A sedate and capable young person," Mrs. Crawford had called her. Susan found her that, and more. She had evidently enjoyed the advantage of a good mother's teaching in

her childhood, and had profited by the lessons. It was the truthfulness and simplicity of her character that Susan admired first in her; when she came to know her better, she admired no less the firmness of Christian principle, the good sense she showed in various ways, and the knowledge of all affairs which belong to a woman's sphere of duty. She was good-tempered, and "soft spoken," as the country people called it; but she was not "soft," or easily turned from any purpose which she had designed to carry out. Indeed, her firmness, so quietly and mildly shown in many ways, pleased Susan more than all else, for it was the very quality that her brother had need of to carry him past some dangers and strengthen him in the midst of some difficulties likely to meet him on his way through life.

"And she ought to have been a vain, silly creature, with a face like hers," said Susan. "I mean it would not have been surprising had she been so. I cannot but wonder at Mark's good fortune."

She had almost said, "I cannot but wonder what she should see in Mark to make her care for him as she does;" but even to Anne she would not say that.

"She might have looked higher, as you used to say, Anne; but if she is content, that is enough."

"Did I ever say that, Susie? It was not fair to our brother to say so. He will yet be a man to whom any woman might

look up. And then, dear—they love one another.”

Susan laughed softly.

“Yes. It is wonderful how love makes all equal. But I believe you are right about Mark, and Mary will be the making of him.”

“As she has already been the saving of him—in a sense.”

“I would not quite say that, Anne; there have been other influences. But how the aspect of things changes as time goes on. Think of the trouble I made myself and you about Timothy Brady’s niece!”

“It is foolish to borrow trouble about anything, I think,” said Anne. “Faith and patience bring most things right after a while, or make us content with them as they are.”

“But it was not my faith and patience that brought this right,” said Susan, humbly.

“God has been good to us all,” said Anne, gently.

Mr. Crawford had not as yet so arranged his affairs in the city as to be altogether free from the cares of business, but in the meantime he was doing his best to fall back into the ways and work in which his boyhood and youth had been passed—with a difference. “He took things easy,” his man Watt said, which was true. He ploughed, and sowed, and took part in all else that was going on, with a will, and seemed to enjoy it. But he enjoyed something else too. He enjoyed the long leisure of summer mornings, loitering with a

book in his hand or with his little boys as his companions in the pastures or the maple woods, or under the orchard trees. He took long "noon spells," and sometimes forgot to come to the field again when afternoon luncheon was over.

It was all well enough, Watt said, to keep up the steam for an hour or two, or for half a day, or for several days, but that Mr. Adam would never settle down to the slow plodding life that had satisfied his brother John, was not to be believed.

Indeed, Adam was doubtful of it himself for a good while; but in the meantime, as a sort of pause in his real work—a halting-place at which to rest for a while—he made the most of the summer days, and lingered on from week to week, loth, he said, to leave the green and pleasant country for the dust, and heat, and loneliness of the town.

He came often to see Miss Anne during these days. At first he took pains to have a reason for his visits. He brought his boys, or he came for them. He had something to say to Mark, or a book, or a basket of fruit for Miss Anne, or a message from his mother to one or other of the sisters. But after a time he came for no special reason, or he gave none, and fell quite into his old ways with them both—the ways of the time when Susan had looked upon him as the kindest and pleasantest of friends and neighbours, without a thought of his wishing to be anything more.

That he had not forgotten those days was clear enough, for he often spoke of them and of the good he had got in Miss Anne's house, and through her teaching. But he had quite forgotten that which had come after, Susan told herself as the days went on, and she told herself also that it was well that it should be so, and was inclined to take herself to task because she could not quite forget it also.

But she "took the good" of these days, and of their renewed intercourse with their friend, as she could not have done last year. She was willing now to live from day to day, without looking too far forward. Whatever had "come and gone," it was good to have Adam Crawford for a friend again.

Except in friendliness, he was not the same Adam who had been Anne's right hand in school long ago. Intercourse with a larger world than he had known then had done much for him; the grace of God had done more. It was a constant interest to both sisters to notice the difference as it manifested itself in word and deed in many quiet and effective ways, in their own circle, and in a circle wider than theirs. It would be well for the township of Broadmeadows and for the whole country-side, they said, should Mr. Crawford decide to take up his abode at the farm; and whether he did so or not, there was no doubt but his influence would be felt on the side of right, wherever his lot might be cast.

"He would never have been the man he is,

had he settled down here just as his brother John did. It was quite as well that he went away," said Susan to her sister, one day.

"Yes, perhaps. But I am very glad he has come back again," said Anne. "Very glad."

Sue gave a little inward sigh.

"But, then, he has not really come back. Not that there is anything to fret about, however. I would rather have Adam Crawford's friendship than another man's love."

She did not say this to Anne; she hardly said it to herself in so many words. And though she yielded that afternoon, for a little while, to restlessness that made the house and indoor occupation a weariness to her, she came back in an hour or two from the high pasture with her brother with a face as peaceful and bright as even Anne could desire.

But about midsummer a real trouble came upon Sue, or something that looked to her at first sight like a real trouble. It came in the shape of a proposal from the proper authorities that she should go back to her old place in Greenhill School.

The proposal, and the manner of it, were very flattering to her; and the terms offered were so liberal that prudence and a sense of duty would not permit her at once to decline. In the circumstances in which they would find themselves after Mark's marriage, nothing more desirable for Anne and herself could possibly present itself than this opportunity to return to their old life in the old place.

But the trouble was this. She did not like the thought of it. She told herself that she hated the thought of it. And she must decide the matter for herself. She could get no real help either from her brother or sister in the matter. Mark would in his kindly way declare that there was no need for their going away; but this would not make it easier or wiser to remain, seeing this way had been opened for them to go away.

Anne, she knew, or she thought she knew, would choose this way of life for her, for the sake of both; but she knew that Anne would never say one word to induce her to undertake the work against her own will. It was clear she must decide the matter for herself.

So she asked for a day or two to consider the matter, meaning to do her best to come to a right decision. She said nothing to her sister about it; and Anne, seeing her silent and preoccupied, waited patiently till she should be ready to tell her trouble, whatever it might be.

What she would have liked would have been to live on at the farm till some other way offered to her, either as a teacher or as something else. Then Anne could still remain a while with their brother till circumstances should permit them to have their home together, as they had had before. But the old life in Greenhill it seemed impossible that she should take up again.

Still, there seemed no better thing to do,

and she was ashamed of her hesitation—her rebellion against circumstances which it implied.

“I must decide it to-day,” she said to herself. To Anne she said, “I am going to the high pasture; tell Mark not to wait for me, I do not feel like going to Langton to-day. And when I come back, dear, I hope I shall be in a more reasonable frame of mind,” added she with an uncertain smile.

“It will be all right, dear. You will get help in your time of need. Good-bye.”

So she went away and was gone a long time. Sitting on a hillock of moss under the shadow of a great maple, her favourite seat, she went over the whole matter, and she could only come to the conclusion that had forced itself upon her the moment the proposal to go into the school was made. All things connected with the matter combined to prove to her judgment that, whether it were agreeable to her or not, it would certainly be wise for her to accept the situation, and close with the offer made to her. Duties for which she was fit lay before her in it—a sphere of usefulness, not large perhaps, but well defined, was open to her.

All this was clear enough; and, above all, Anne would rejoice to get back to her old home and old associations again. Had she any right to hesitate? Was not her long hesitation an indulgence of her old self-will in another form? Ought she not to take all

these favourable circumstances as indications that it was right for her to give up her own will, and take up the work that fell to her hand?

She had prayed much to be guided aright in this thing; and sitting there in the soft stillness of the coming evening she prayed again, earnestly and with tears, entreating that in this as in all things she might have the power given her to be able to forget herself and her own desires—that she be made willing to do the work given her to do, however hard and however humble it might be.

And then, sitting in the grateful shade, with sweet summer scents and sights and sounds around her, a great peace fell upon her. Was it possible that He who clothed the grass of the field, and who cared for the myriad living creatures whose life was but a summer day, should forget His promise to her as one of those who loved Him, that all things should work together for her good? Impossible!

“And I shall begin anew. And it will be work for God in a sense which could not have been true before. I am not afraid; I do not think I need to be afraid. I will wait two days before I send my answer, and I will say nothing to Anne till then; but unless something unforeseen should happen, I may look upon myself as assistant-teacher in Greenhill School for a year at least.”

It cannot be said that she liked the pros-

pect before her, but she felt that her decision was right, and she strove to make the best to herself of what was not pleasing in it. And so well did she succeed that she came down from the high pasture with no cloud of care on her brow, and Anne was willing still to wait to be told her trouble since now it had passed away.

And so two days passed, and then the letter was written. It was not sent that night, as she meant it to be. Mark was kept late in the field, and it was too late for that night's post, and might as well wait. It was never sent, because something happened.

Mr. Crawford, who less than a week ago, had gone to the city for six weeks at least, came suddenly home again.

"I hope it is because you have decided at last that a farmer you are to be," said Mark, when that night Mr. Crawford came in.

"No, it is not decided yet. The decision does not rest with me," said Mr. Crawford gravely. "But," added he, after the pause of a moment, "it will be decided before I go away again."

Susan came into the room with her letter in her hand, but finding Mr. Crawford there, put it aside, saying nothing about it.

"I shall never feel sure that we are to have you for good till you cut all connection with business in the city, and the sooner the better," said Mark; and then he yielded to little Jack's compelling hand, and was led off to see the horses in the field.

"It will be decided before I go away again," repeated Mr. Crawford, rising.

"Is anything wrong?" asked Susan, rising also, for Adam had turned very pale, and was regarding her with a strange look.

"Sue," said he, standing before her, "are you going to send me away again?"

"I do not understand you, Adam."

"Don't you, dear? Don't you know what I have been waiting for all this time? It is you who are to decide whether I am to stay or go away again. Anne, speak for me to your sister." But Anne said nothing.

"Have you never a word for me, Sue?"

Susan was greatly agitated. She could not have commanded many words. One was enough. "Stay."

In a little while Mark came in again with Jack. "I say, Sue, if you want your letter sent, here is your chance, John is going to the Corners, after all. Give it to me and I will tell him to post it. But be quick."

"My letter!" repeated Sue.

"Yes—there it is in the pocket of your apron. Give it me."

Sue took it out and looked at it, as if it had been some curious thing.

"I don't think I shall send it, Mark. I shall have to write it again."

Mark whistled. "You were anxious to get it sent a while ago; but it's all right I suppose."

"Is it about the school?" asked Adam.

"And must you write it again, Sue?" said

her sister. "Were you content to go back to the old work?"

"I said I would go back. I cannot say I was quite content."

"And I was only just in time," said Mr. Crawford. "Mark, it is decided now. I am to be a farmer after all?"

Instead of answering, Mark went up to his sister and kissed her; but even to her he did not say a word for a little while. When Adam offered his hand he shook it heartily, and then said—

"But one thing you must mind, Sue—you are not going to have more than just your share of Anne. Mary and I have a claim on her as well as you." And then he kissed his elder sister, and Anne saw that there were tears in his eyes. They were glad and thankful tears—glad for Sue, thankful for himself.

"They had long patience with me, and it might have been so different," he said to Adam, when he bade him good-night.

"Are you pleased, Anne? Are you glad for me?" said Susan, when they found themselves alone that night.

"I am glad for Adam," said Anne, smiling. "Yes, and I am glad for you, and for myself as well."

"And were you not very much surprised?"

"No, I cannot say I was surprised."

"No! And yet you never said a word. I wonder why!"

"It was as well not. You had something

else—even more important than this—to settle with yourself. It was as well that it should be settled first.”

“And Adam—did he think so?”

“Oh, I cannot answer for Adam,” said Anne, smiling and kissing her softly. “I think Adam was afraid to try again.”

By-and-by Sue said, “Is it not strange that this should come, just when I had made up my mind to go back to the old life and be content with it? I think I should have been content with it after a while.”

“But this is best. And it might have been years ago, Adam told me. Why was it not, Susie?”

“It is a long story—no, not so very long. I did not know my own mind; that was all. I am glad it did not come before, however. I think I am glad. I am sure it is better for Adam that it did not, and I think for me also.”

“Our times are in His hands,” said Anne, softly.

“And, Anne,” said Susan eagerly, yet with a little hesitation, “Adam is as glad to think of your coming to his home as of mine.”

Anne laughed.

“Not quite, dear; but I know he is glad, and—not to forget Mark and Mary now and then—I wish for no other home than yours.”

For answer, Susan kissed her joyfully, and so it has been from that day to this.

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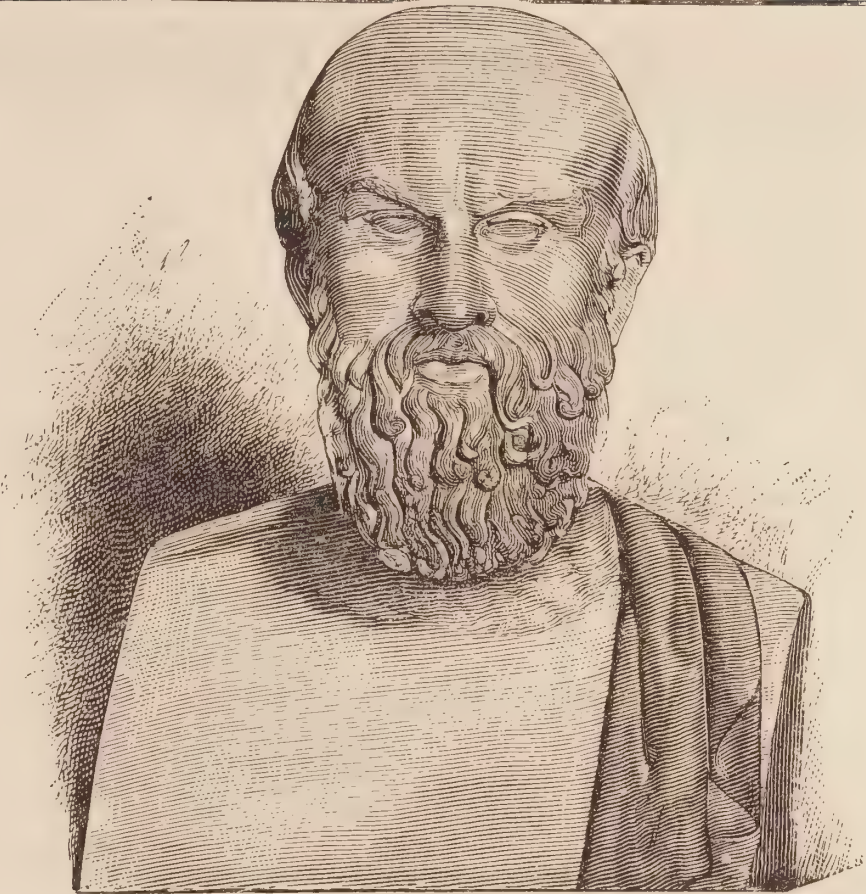
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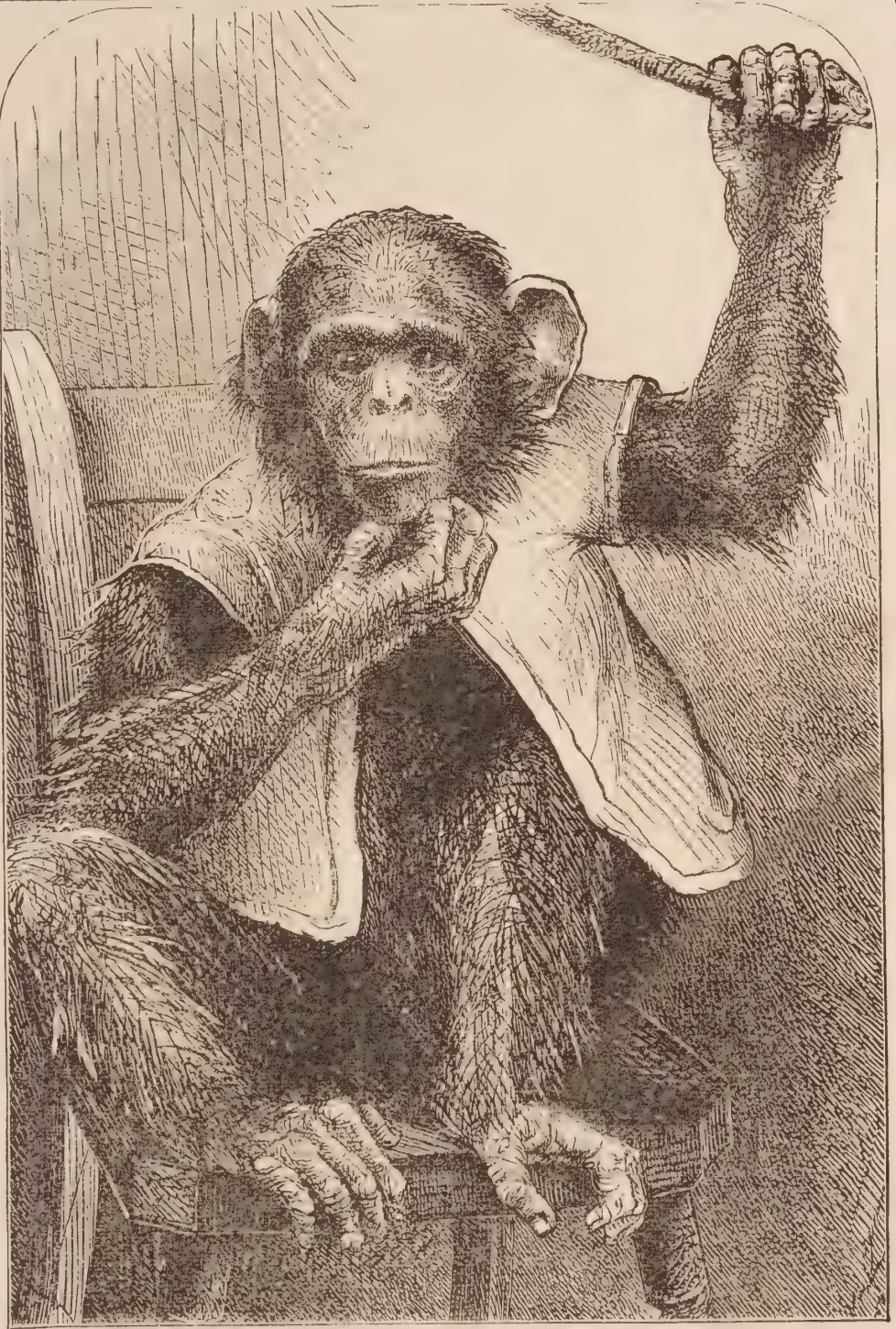
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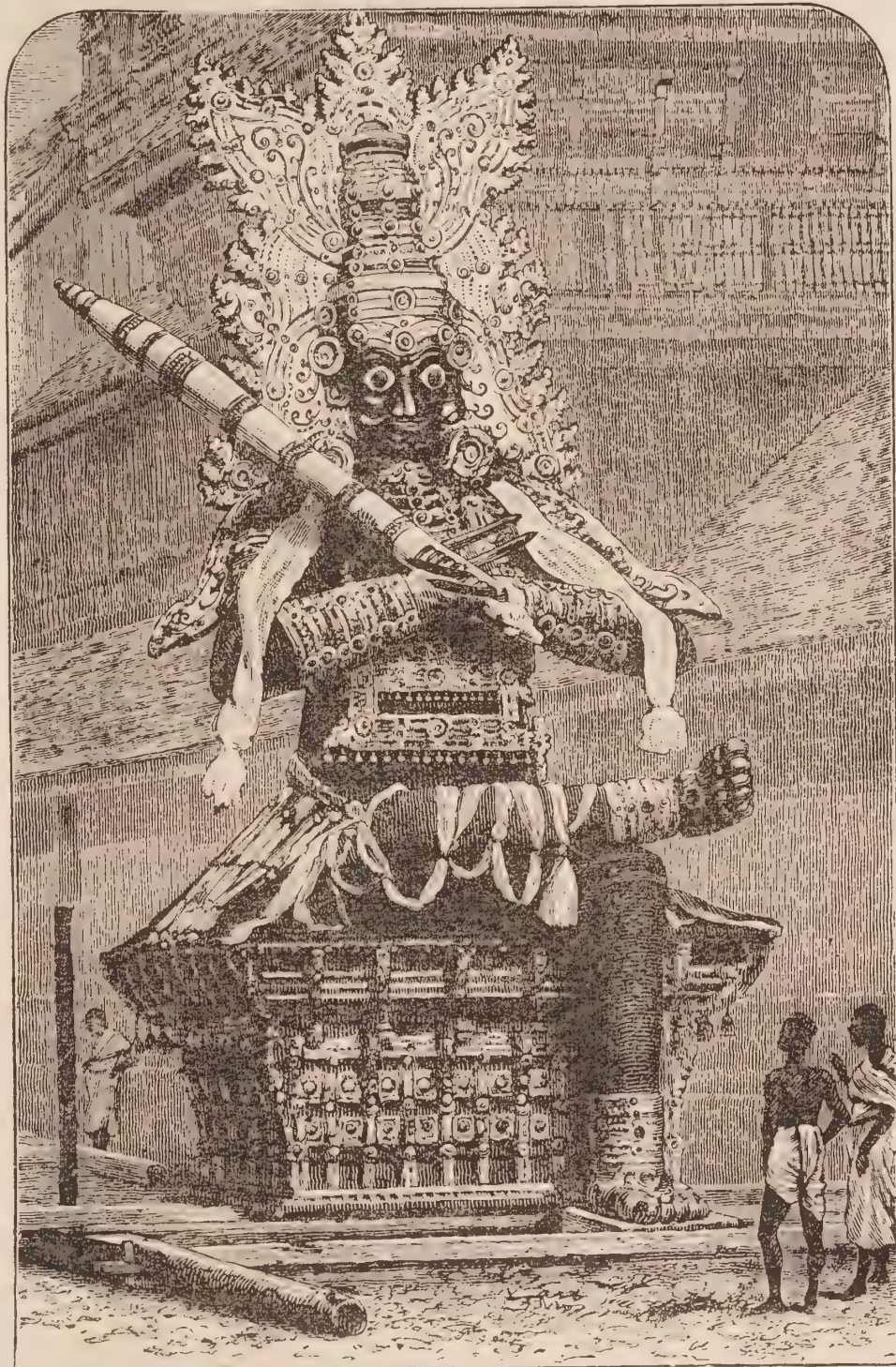
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